DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 258 932 SP 026 110

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TITLE Creative Teachers Speak.
PUB DATE Feb 85
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Eastern Educational Research Association Conference (8th; Virginia Beach, VA, February 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Creative Activities; *Creative Development; *Creativity; *Divergent Thinking; Elementary Secondary Education; *Student Motivation; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Characteristics; *Teacher Role; Teacher Student Relationship

ABSTRACT

Information for this study was complied from teachers identified as creative to determine if, in their opinions, creativity can be developed or enhanced; and, if so, how it can be encouraged or developed in others. Subjects were 60 teachers seen as creative and interviewed by graduate students during the academic years of 1978-84. Teachers ranged in age from young adults to retired citizens and included both men and women. They taught at all levels and in all subject areas. Virtually all subjects stated that creativity can be developed and/or encouraged. Fifty-six subjects offered information as to how this may be done. This information was categorized, described, and discussed. The categories included: (1) teaching methods/techniques; (2) climate/atmosphere; (3) encouragement; (4) providing experiences; (5) teaching qualities; (6) reward/appreciation; and (7) promoting individuality. (Author/JD)

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ABSTRACT

Creative Teachers Speak

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Creative Teachers Speak

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Subjects were 60 teachers seen as creative and interviewed by graduate students during the academic years of 1978 - 1984. Teachers ranged in age from young adults to retired citizens and included both men and women. They taught at all levels and in all subject areas.

Virtually all subjects stated that creativity can be developed and/or encouraged. Fifty-six subjects offered information as to how this may be done. This information was categorized, described, and discussed. The categories and the number of teachers responding is as follows:

Category	Frequency
Teaching Methods/Techniques	33
Climate/Atmosphere	24
Encouragement	20
Providing Experiences	12
Teaching Qualities	13
Reward/Appreciation	9
Promoting Individuality	6

Creative Teachers Speak

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Paper presented at the Eighth Eastern Educational Research Association Conference, Virginia Beach, Virginia
February 1985

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The assumption that creative ability can be enhanced through providing environmental conditions that encourage its functioning (Parnes, 1967) is fairly well accepted. As yet, however, while there are many sources available for developing creative ability, there is no comprehensive theory of instruction. A number of experiments seem to confirm that it is not only possible to develop it but it is also extremely desirable to do so (Jones, 1972).

During the past two decades, numerous articles, research studies, and sources have been directed toward classroom teachers and how they might develop the creative abilities of their charges. While some of these have involved classroom teachers in the development of exercises to encourage creativity (Project IMPLODE, 1971; Talents Unlimited Developer Demonstration Project, 1978; Frost, 1977; etc.) for the most part, information related to the subject is directed at the classroom teacher, rather than describing ways in which classroom teachers themselves view creativity and its development. The focus of the development of creativity in any educational sub-group is commendable (Holman, 1984). One is forced to wonder if the inculcation of this vital ability can ever really take place if teachers fail to value its significance to the point of confirming their commitment to its enhancement.

Studies dealing with surveys of teachers and the ways in which they perceive creativity are few. This study makes a contribution in reporting the views teachers identified as creative have of the particular ways in which they feel it can be encouraged.

In the present study, information was compiled from 60 teachers or former teachers identified as creative to determine if, in their

opinions, creativity can be developed or enhanced; and if so, how it can be encouraged or developed in others. It was felt that creative teachers are a particularly relevant sample for such a study because it is their views and actions that affect the lives of many young people.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 60 teachers seen as creative and interviewed by graduate students who were registered for a course entitled, "Creativity: Gifted and Talented" during the academic years of 1978-1984. Teachers ranged in age from young adults to retired citizens and included both men and women. They came from all levels: elementary, junior high school, high school, and college; specialists such as music and art teachers, librarians, and some school administrators. All subjects used for this analysis were identified by the interviewers, from the information obtained during the interview, as possessing creative ability.

Data Collection

Graduate students were given an assignment to interview a person they saw as creative. The interview assignment came after students were exposed to studies involving the personality characteristics of creative people. The assignment read as follows:

1. Write a statement which describes a creative person. Write this statement in your own words without reference to material on "characteristics of the creative person" listed in the course bibliography.

2. Check your statement against those given in the course bibliography. Write a paragraph designed to compare your statement with that in the basic source--how do the statements differ?

3. Make a list of the five characteristics you feel are most important in describing a creative person.

4. Identify a person you consider creative. The person you identify must possess at least five of the characteristics we have studied. Interview the person you have selected to determine whether or not your initial impression of your subject is confirmed. What personality characteristics of the creative person does your subject possess? (Interview questions will be discussed in class.)

5. Summarize your interview. Is your subject more creative than you initially supposed, about as creative, or less creative? Qualify your decision by citing at least five examples from the interview that support your conclusions.

Only two of the questions asked were used for this study; they are:

Do you feel creativity can be developed and/or encouraged?

In what ways can creativity be developed and/or encouraged?

Data Analysis

Responses to the first question regarding the subjects' opinions as to whether creativity can be developed and/or encouraged were simply tabulated.

Two graduate students were instructed to perform a content analysis of the responses to the question involving the ways in which creativity can be developed and/or encouraged. The graduate students were instructed to study several responses in order to generate mutually exclusive major areas or categories in which the ideas related to developing creativity could be placed. The students were then instructed to review each response to the question and tabulate the frequencies for each category. The number of categories identified by the students was 16 and 10, respectively. As a result of this difference, the author independently analyzed the responses and identified nine major areas or

categories. In the final step, the author reviewed the major areas identified by the two graduate students and himself to determine commonalities and differences and ultimately derived the final list of categories.

Results and Discussion

Virtually all 60 teachers stated that creativity can be developed and/or encouraged. Six subjects debated as to the differences between developing and encouraging, but concluded that it can be encouraged. Eight subjects justified their responses by stating, "to a certain extent." Other responses ranged from a simple "yes" to very emphatic statements, such as, "of course". "sure it can", and "definitely". Two such replies are quoted:

> "I absolutely believe that creativity can be developed, and it is the responsibility of caretakers to develop it."
> High School Teacher

> "If I didn't believe so, I wouldn't be teaching."
> College Professor

Fifty-six subjects offered information as to how creativity can be encouraged or developed. Some subjects offered brief explanations including only one example. Eleven subjects included many examples listing as many as eight separate ways in which creativity can be enhanced. A few subjects elaborated upon their ideas by giving examples to illustrate them, or by offering personal experiences regarding the ways they use to develop creative ability. One example is included as follows:

> "Yes, it can be developed: by giving open-ended situations; by encouraging a person to go one step further with an idea; by helping a person discover their unique strengths and talents; by helping a person develop more than one answer to a question; by broadening a person's frame of reference and giving him a variety of experiences. The last one shows the

> behaviorist in me. Reward a person for new and original ideas--like the kid who draws a purple turkey; rather than tell him he's wrong, tell him, 'What a neat idea!'"
>
> Special Education Teacher

The joint review of categories revealed that the differences in the content analysis of the three people were not so much in the categories identified but rather in how specific they were in attending to detail in the responses. A careful re-examination by the author revealed seven main ways in which teachers feel creativity can be encouraged or developed. Table 1 summarizes these categories and their frequencies.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Thirty-three subjects (55 percent) suggested ways to encourage creativity that involved teaching methods and/or techniques. These responses were placed in two areas; that is, general methods/techniques and specific methods/techniques

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Insert Table 2 About Here

The most frequently mentioned specific technique (15 subjects) was that of example/demonstration. Twelve subjects referred to techniques classified as divergent thinking and feeling techniques, and seven subjects referred to techniques classified as problem-solving. Exemplary comments are as follows:

> "The one-year-old child takes a spoon or a sponge and makes the sound of an airplane going through the air. The child is 'approximating' the airplane, it is not precisely an airplane. Children are always 'approximating'! If the caretaker nurtures these 'approximation' skills before 'zooming

in', then children will find a balance. Society's tendency is to value precision thinking."

Owner of School for Young Children

"I would develop creativity by providing a lot of success, by teaching learners how to deal with fairure, and by using a wide variety of teaching methods which encourage divergent thinking.

High School Teacher

"I know education can help to produce creativity. There are some very definite creative training processes. Teaching children to brainstorm; delete, combine, add, rearrange; and convincing children to take risks is important . . . "

Secondary School English Teacher

"I try to develop creativity by getting students to solve problems. There is no doubt that students are capable of, and should be able to creatively solve their own problems. I try to get students to use different ways of solving problems . . . "

Elementary School Teacher

"Students and their guardians should have the option of selecting their own teachers. Learning and teaching styles should be analyzed, diagnosed, and matched accordingly . . . "

Private School Teacher

Twenty-four subjects (40 percent) made reference to the importance of the general climate/atmosphere in encouraging creativity. The most often made comments (8 subjects) referred to the need for an accepting, loving, and secure environment. Five subjects referred to the importance of allowing students freedom to make choices and decisions. Four subjects commented on the importance of allowing students to make mistakes. Exemplary comments are as follows:

"My students know what I expect, and they can do anything they want in this classroom within reasonable limits. I don't mean I'm overly permissive either. I mean the children and I use good common sense to tell what is reasonable and what isn't."

First Grade Teacher

"We squash individuality; we do not value uniqueness enough. The acquisition of knowledge should not be our primary concern, and I'm afraid that it is."

Sixth Grade Teacher

> "I think the best way to encourage creativity is to become aware of the fact that it is o.k. to 'mess up' or make a mistake. Take the risk, feel comfortable about yourself, and don't worry about what others think . . . A classroom must include this important ingredient. In order to release your creativity to the fullest degree, you must feel this freedom from outward restrictions."
>
> Gifted Education Teacher

Twenty subjects (33 percent) referred to the importance of encouragement. Comments referred to positive reinforcement, positive input from supportive adults, helping the students to "go beyond", fostering open-mindedness, and generally promoting qualities that develop creativity. Exemplary comments include:

> "If we are to encourage creativity in students, we must not stifle those persons' ideas but give them the encouragement they need to develop their creativity."
>
> Sixth Grade Teacher

> "Encourage students to pursue personal interests, no matter what. Be a good listener, accept the individual as is . . . Encourage the expression in whatever form the individual sees it. Creativity is stifled by those who have set patterns--avoiding this is most encouraging."
>
> Retired Educator

Twelve subjects (20 percent) referred to providing experiences for children to develop creative ability. In a general way, subjects suggested experiences that build success, develop responsibility, provide variety, and encourage practice. Specifically, experiences related to developing hobbies and collections, observation skills, and media presentations. Exemplary suggestions are as follows:

> "Creativity is what teaching is all about. Anyone can 'just teach', but not just anyone can capture the children's interests by doing it. You really have to work at creative teaching. My children come in the classroom every day just bursting at the seams. They can't wait to get involved in the exciting things we have to do for the day. They know I'm the exact opposite of the sit-down-and-shut-up-and-fold-your-hands teacher . . . "
>
> First Grade Teacher

> " . . . Give children all kinds of things and stimulii . . . Make all kinds of materials available . . . Everybody should collect something, bottle caps to stalking birds. Get children really turned on to at least one thing. Hopefully, this interest will spread to other areas . . . Every child should have binoculars. You'll be amazed at what you can see and the detail."
>
> Retired Teacher

Thirteen subjects (21 percent) mentioned one or more teaching qualities important to developing creative ability. There was no one quality singled out as important although these subjects referred to the importance of being a "nurturing, caring person". Two subjects mentioned the importance of the teacher as a "good listener"; "being enthusiastic", "being aware of the creativity in students", "being open-minded", and "freeing oneself" as a teacher. Other teaching qualities mentioned by one individual included showing sincere interest, doing things in a new way, using a sense of humor, exhibiting drive, and being an open, responsive, supportive, and encouraging force. Exemplary comments include:

> "The development of creativity includes myself as an open, responsive, supportive, and encouraging force."
>
> High School Art Teacher

> "A teacher must be sensitive and aware of the creativity in students to bring out their creativity."
>
> College Professor

> "Open-mindedness toward others and the teaching environment is most important. As individuals, we must free ourselves in order to help others free themselves."
>
> Private School Administrator

Nine subjects (15 percent) commented on the importance of reward/appreciation. Three subjects referred to the importance of praising creative efforts. Two subjects referred to complimenting students' creative achievements and valuing uniqueness and creativity in children. Exemplary comments are as follows:

"Teachers can so easily stifle creativity. We need to be very careful to react positively to the child's ideas."
High School English Teacher

"I look for ways to praise students for their originality. The encouragement I can give is half the battle . . . "
High School English Teacher

Seven subjects (11 percent) mentioned the importance of promoting individuality. Comments related to allowing children to "do their own thing", giving them the chance to be themselves, accepting the individual as he/she is, and encouraging individuality and personal interests. Exemplary comments are as follows:

"Encourage pursuit of personal interests, no matter what. Accept the individual as he is and encourage free expression in whatever form the individual sees it."
High School Drama Teacher

"Let students do their own thing, don't press them into a predetermined mold."
Third Grade Teacher

"Provide students with lots of directed activities which give them the chance to do things differently and/or in their own way."
High School Science Teacher

"We should let everyone 'follow the will-o'-the-wisp'."
Elementary Teacher

There was overwhelming confirmation by the creative teachers involved in this study that creativity can be encouraged and/or developed. While this knowledge is not new, it is nevertheless enlightening to establish that creative teachers agree with the current philosophy of those working in the area. That is, that creativity can be fostered and developed in an educational program.

Creative teachers used for this study also had important suggestions to offer as to the ways in which creativity can be developed and/or encouraged. Through the literature, one can easily support the eight major areas reported as being vital to

the enhancement of creativity. Various researchers and authorities in the field of creativity also confirm the specific suggestions offered by the subjects as being important to the enhancement of creativity.

Rather than offering new information in this study, creative teachers confirmed what many leaders in creativity have been saying for a number of years as to conditions around which creativity may be enhanced. However, it is beneficial to know that creative teachers have such a sound philosophy related to creativity and the ways in which it can be developed.

Educational leaders planning programs to meet the current trends in a back-to-basics movement would do well to take heed from the creative teachers within their systems. Using the strengths of these people in curriculum planning might do a great deal in fostering and developing creative ability, as well as providing for a balance in educational philosophy. Educational leaders would be benefited by using various approaches to identify creative teachers and then using their strengths in joint efforts to develop curriculum.

TABLE 1

Categories of the Ways in Which Teachers Feel Creativity Can Be Encouraged and/or Developed

	Category	Frequency
1.	Teaching Methods/Techniques	33
2.	Climate/Atmosphere	24
3.	Encouragement	20
4.	Providing Experiences	12
5.	Teaching Qualities	13
6.	Reward/Appreciation	9
7.	Promoting Individuality	6

TABLE 2

Teaching Methods and/or Techniques

that Encourage Creativity

Methods/Techniques	Frequency
1. General Methods/Techniques	14
a. give many opportunities for students to express themselves creatively	
b. give options (don't set limits)	
c. expand on students' interests (teach people, not subject matter)	
d. curb the "I can't"	
e. use self-paced, somewhat independent student-centered approaches	
2. Specific Methods/Techniques	18
a. example/demonstration	
b. art experiences, creative writing experiences	
c. humanistic approaches, affective education programs	
d. honors programs	
e. role-playing, simulation games	
f. divergent thinking	
1) allow students to risk	
2) encourage many and divergent ideas	
3) use brainstorming techniques	
g. problem solving	
1) encourage investigation, experimentation	
2) give students the product and allow them to find the process	
3) teach problem-solving skills	
4) use evaluative and interpretive questioning techniques	

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